

VZCZCXRO5587
OO RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHDIR
DE RUEHRH #1621/01 3481518
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 141518Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2057
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE 2783
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE 5348
RUEHDH/AMCONSUL DHAHRAN IMMEDIATE 0381
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH IMMEDIATE 0489
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUMICEA/USCINCCENT INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 RIYADH 001621

NOFORN
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/14/2019
TAGS: [MASS MOPS PREL SA YM](#)
SUBJECT: SITREP ON SAUDI MILITARY OPERATIONS AGAINST THE
HOUTHIS, DECEMBER 14, 2009

REF: A. SANAA 2117
[1](#)B. RIYADH 1558
[1](#)C. RIYADH 1570
[1](#)D. RIYADH 1547

RIYADH 00001621 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Amb. James B. Smith for reasons 1.4 (A), (B) AND (D)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (S) The Yemeni town of Razah near the Saudi border was apparently struck by either Saudi or Yemeni aircraft on December 13; international press sources report over 30 deaths. If these reports are accurate this would be the deadliest attack to date against the Houthis since the Saudis commenced military operations in early November. A ground and air battle of undetermined size also took place in recent days as Saudi forces moved in to reclaim the Saudi border town of Al-Jabri from Houthi fighters. End Summary

MILITARY SITUATION: FIGHTING CONTINUES

[1](#)2. (C) Saudi operations against Houthi targets in the border area continue. The two major military events of recent days have been the reported aerial bombardment of the Yemeni town of Razah and a Saudi offensive to retake the Saudi border town of Al-Jabri. Houthi sources claim that Saudi aircraft conducted fifty raids on Razah, resulting in more than 70 deaths. International press reports have not confirmed whether the aircraft were Saudi or Yemeni, and report a lower death toll of about 30. (Comment: Embassy does not yet have data with which to assess these reports. End comment.) The Saudi government has not commented on the Razah event. Regarding the Saudi offensive to retake the Saudi border village of Al-Jabri, an unidentified Saudi military source confirmed that the village was back under Saudi control after an operation that employed tanks and helicopter gunships.

MEDIA FOCUS: HAILING CROWN PRINCE SULTAN

[1](#)3. (S) Local and national Saudi media have been largely focused on hailing the return of Crown Prince Sultan. (One of Crown Prince Sultan's first acts on the day after his

arrival was to visit wounded Saudi soldiers in Riyadh hospitals.) Reports of fighting from the southern front continue, but with little prominence. A digest of recent local press articles is below.

- Arab News 12/7/09: The Saudi Royal Navy destroyed two boats in the joint KSA-ROYG waters. The boats began to flee after refusing to stop for checks and were fired upon by frigates. The boats exploded violently, because they were carrying arms and ammunition. (Comment: Embassy has been unable to confirm the story. End note.)

- Arab News 12/7/09: Military sources say that more reinforcements have arrived in Jizan, including tank units with Bradley and Piranha model vehicles. Embassy DAO has confirmed one battalion of M-60 Tanks and two battalions of M113 personnel carriers have recently arrived into the southern border region. Intelligence reporting shows signs of major construction approximately 22 km from the border, assessed by DAO to be a new command post for the Royal Saudi Land Forces.

- Saudi Gazette 12/8/09: Saudi forces cleared a minefield left behind by fleeing infiltrators near Mt. Dokhan.

- Al-Minbar (Pro-Houthi website) 12/11/09: The rebels have seized full control of the Al-Jabri Saudi military post and taken possession of weapons, communications, vehicles and surveillance materials. Rebel spokesman Mohammed Abdessalam spoke to AFP on the phone and said the rebels overran the Saudi post on 12/9/09 and "forced 200 soldiers to flee." (This report was initially denied by Saudi officials, but subsequently an unidentified Saudi military source claimed that the town had been retaken - Canadian Press, 12/13/09.)

RIYADH 00001621 002.2 OF 003

- Asharq al-Awsat 12/11/09: Saudi forces have detained 1,805 people on the border this month. This number also included African refugees trying to enter the Kingdom illegally.

- Saudi Gazette 12/9/09: 400 men from the Aal al-Harith Yam tribe from Akifa in Najran arrived at a Saudi Army base ready to fight alongside the Saudi forces. Maj. Gen. Khidhr bin Saoud al-Zahrani said "One would expect nothing less from Aal al-Harith. The people of Najran are known for their loyalty, generosity and bravery." The tribe sacrificed 15 sheep in honor of the Saudi troops stationed in the region.

- Saudi Gazette 12/10/09: Quarter page article with color picture about a 14 year-old boy (pictured holding an AK-47) who wishes he could fight the infiltrators. Yousef al-Safhi says he wants to offer something to the country he loves, "It's time to stand up and support our soldiers on the border."

SAUDI - IRANIAN WAR OF WORDS ABATES

14. (C) There has been no further escalation in the Saudi-Iranian war of words since 4 December when Iranian Speaker of the Parliament Ali Larjani condemned Saudi Arabia's offensive against fellow Muslims. The Saudis did not officially respond to that attack. During a 12 December visit by Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki to Sudan, Sudanese President Al-Bashir remarked during a press conference that all states in the region, including Iran, should support the restoration of stability and he more pointedly rejected any attempt to "spoil Saudi stability." Speaking at the Manama Security Dialogue about the conflict, Mottaki apparently refrained from comments about Saudi Arabia, though he said Iran had "ruled out" military intervention as a solution to the rebellion, saying the problems could be resolved through dialogue, and stressing Yemen's sovereignty. "Our stance towards Yemen is very clear and we strongly believe in non-interference in its domestic affairs," Mottaki was

reported to have said.

SAUDI MILITARY PROCUREMENT ON FAST TRACK

15. (S/NF) Embassy DAO has heard reports that the King has designated contingency funds for emergency military procurements. Local Raytheon representatives provided Pol/Mil Counselor with a report on how this has affected their business, noting that Raytheon is currently working a variety of urgent contracts with a total value of over \$1 billion in response to Ministry of Defense requests for munitions to replenish inventory. Some of these contracts are for direct commercial sales (DCS), others through the foreign military sales (FMS) process. The largest DCS contract is for laser-guided bombs. FMS cases are being drawn up for the purchase of additional AMRAAM missiles and AIM-9X missiles. The Ministry of Defense has also approached Raytheon to serve as a prime contractor for additional weapons purchases, including from non-U.S. companies. (Raytheon is not likely to agree to do so.)

COMMENT

16. (C) It remains to be seen whether Crown Prince Sultan will play a more visible role in managing the conduct of the Houthis campaign. Some Embassy diplomatic contacts report that the King is not happy with progress to date under Assistant Mindef Khalid bin Sultan's leadership. Though publicly vowing to continue fighting as long as it takes, with the fighting against the Houthis having dragged on for nearly 40 days, the Saudi leadership may feel growing pressure to consider a truce. Claims that Saudi forces have "successfully repelled the infiltrators" ring increasingly hollow as casualties mount and more forces are deployed to the border. We expect that the Saudis are headed to discussions at the December 14-15 GCC summit looking not only for a GCC reaffirmation of the Saudi right to self-defense, but also for support for Yemen and possible avenues to bring

RIYADH 00001621 003.2 OF 003

the fighting to an end.
SMITH